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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
Directorate of Intelligence  
21 June 1967

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Sino-Vietnamese Frictions

Summary

Relations between Peking and Hanoi have deteriorated considerably since the period before the fall of Khrushchev in 1964 when China was the only effective ally the Vietnamese Communists had. There is no evidence, however, that their worsened relations have affected the attitude of either party toward the war. The North Vietnamese show no disposition to quit the field and the Chinese appear willing to continue material and technical assistance to Hanoi as long as the Vietnamese carry on Peking's proxy fight with the US.

The problems between Hanoi and Peking arise on the Chinese side from Moscow's steadily increasing support for the Vietnamese, Hanoi's eager acceptance of Soviet aid, and recurrent displays of independence on Hanoi's part. Peking's concern over the possibility that Hanoi might decide to move toward negotiations has introduced new frictions during recent months.

Hanoi's current attitude toward Peking is clearly one of antipathy, distrust, and dismay. Peking's arrogant preachments on the conduct of the war have

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added to Hanoi's legacy of resentment from historical Chinese imperialism. The mounting confusion of the "cultural revolution" in China has aroused fear and uncertainty among the Vietnamese, who rely heavily on Chinese military aid and food shipments and on Chinese rail lines for transport of Soviet military supplies. In recent months the Vietnamese have probably been further alarmed and angered by Peking's efforts to export the "cultural revolution" by agitation within the ethnic Chinese community in North Vietnam.

### Hanoi's Attitude

1. Hanoi's attitude toward the Chinese Communists has undergone a remarkable shift during the last two and a half years. Prior to the overthrow of Khrushchev, the North Vietnamese clearly regarded China as their primary ally, characterizing their relations as being as close as "lips and teeth." Scarcely an issue of a North Vietnamese publication missed taking a swipe at "modern revisionism" and no occasion was overlooked to offer praise for Peking. It was clear that this attitude on the part of the North Vietnamese stemmed almost entirely from the fact that China supported, both politically and materially, Hanoi's effort to take over South Vietnam whereas Khrushchev offered little material or political support for the war.

2. Today, however, Hanoi's attitude toward Peking has changed to such an extent that the May issue of the North Vietnamese party journal contained an indirect but unmistakable personal attack on Mao Tse-tung and an across-the-board condemnation of Mao's "cultural revolution" innovations.

3. This change in heart on Hanoi's part has occurred gradually. Starting with the offer of the post-Khrushchev Soviet leadership to provide greater support for Hanoi's war effort, the North Vietnamese dropped their anti-Soviet propaganda and began to treat Moscow and Peking on an equal footing. Hanoi has persisted in its policy of maintaining close relations with Moscow ever since, despite blatant efforts by Peking to persuade Hanoi to return to its former antagonistic treatment of the Soviets.

4. As North Vietnam's air defense requirements have grown, particularly for sophisticated equipment only available from the Soviet Union, the relationship with Moscow has become warmer. Coincidentally, Hanoi's relations with Peking have become increasingly strained. Chinese arrogance in pushing its anti-Soviet line and its insistence that Hanoi follow suit have brought relations to a new low.

5. North Vietnam has also found itself being lectured incessantly and imperiously by Peking on the dangers of its offer to talk with the US in return for a cessation of the air strikes on North Vietnam. The North Vietnamese are determined to keep open, however slightly, the option of negotiating with the US whenever this tactic appears beneficial to the Communist cause. The Chinese are adamantly opposed to even mentioning the possibility of negotiations. It is not clear to what extent, if any, Hanoi's decision in January 1967 to offer to talk in return for a cessation of the air strikes was prompted by its concern over the growing chaos in China. At any rate, this issue has become a major irritant in Peking-Hanoi relations and seems likely to remain so for some time.

6. Another area of friction between the two Communist allies is Mao's "cultural revolution." The turmoil occasioned by the excesses of China's internal upheaval has caused Hanoi immense concern. The North Vietnamese are well aware that disorders in China diminish seriously the credibility of the threat of Chinese intervention in the war, an ace in the hole Hanoi would dearly love to keep. Clashes inside China which could result in the interruption of vital Soviet military supplies sent via China's rail lines also deeply concern the North Vietnamese. Thus far, however, there is no good evidence that North Vietnam has suffered any serious loss of supplies as a result of rail transportation disruptions in China. Nonetheless, the threat alone is sufficient to sour Hanoi on the "cultural revolution." Several North Vietnamese spokesmen have recently been quoted [redacted] as having denigrated the Chinese "cultural revolution" and made clear Hanoi's contempt for its excesses.

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7. North Vietnamese antipathy for the "cultural revolution" was undoubtedly heightened in recent months by the activities of Chinese Communist personnel in North Vietnam. In February 1967, Chinese Embassy personnel in Hanoi demonstrated outside the Soviet Embassy. Moreover, the "cultural revolution" is being spread throughout the Chinese community in North Vietnam, [redacted]

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9. Despite their obvious irritation with Mao, the North Vietnamese have thus far carefully veiled the fact that it is the Chinese they are attacking, suggesting that Hanoi desires to avoid an open and direct confrontation with Peking. As long as Peking continues to offer support for Hanoi's war effort and allows Soviet aid to travel through China, it is likely that the North Vietnamese will attempt to keep relations at least at a formally correct level. Moreover, North Vietnam will undoubtedly continue to disregard Chinese advice and pressure whenever it is considered contrary to North Vietnamese interests.

The View From Peking

10. Peking's approach to the Vietnamese war and its attitude toward North Vietnam have, from the outset, been more than usually cynical. All along the Chinese have clearly attempted to keep the conflict a battle by proxy--to be fought at minimum risk and expense to China. Given this situation,

recurrent friction within the Sino-Vietnamese partnership has been inevitable--and during the past year has grown worse.

11. The Chinese have been irritated repeatedly by displays of independence by the North Vietnamese and by Hanoi's continued acceptance of massive assistance from the Soviets. From time to time Peking has shown uneasiness over the possibility that North Vietnamese resolve might falter and that Hanoi might decide to move toward the conference table. It seems likely that concern on this score lies behind the indications of mounting Chinese displeasure with Hanoi since the beginning of the year.

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13. The interview between North Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh and leftist newsman Wilfred Burchett published on 28 January must have added to Peking's misgivings. What the Chinese may have said privately to the Vietnamese about Trinh's moderate-sounding statements on the subject of negotiations is not known, but Peking pointedly avoided any public mention of the widely publicized interview. At the same time, the Chinese made a vigorous though indirect attack on Hanoi's position by belaboring the Soviets for taking a similar stand on the negotiations question.

14. This criticism was most explicit in an authoritative People's Daily article by "Observer" broadcast on 20 February. "Observer" charged that the Soviets were aiding and abetting the US "peace plot" and conspiring with the "imperialists" to force Hanoi into negotiations if the US stopped bombing North Vietnam. The Chinese once again underscored their own position that a solution in Vietnam depended on the complete removal of US forces, not on termination of the bombing.

15. Peking reacted to the meeting between North Vietnamese representatives and UN Secretary General U Thant in Rangoon on 2 March with chilly silence and responded in the same way to Hanoi's release of the February Johnson-Ho correspondence on 21 March. Publication of this exchange of letters pointed up the existence of differences between Peking and Hanoi on the question of negotiations.

16. Increased US military pressure on North Vietnam in late April produced little more than a pro forma response from Peking. It took the Chinese five days to react to strikes against targets in the Haiphong area and Peking's Foreign Ministry statement, finally broadcast on 25 April, was a replay of earlier cautious statements condemning the US and promising general Chinese "support" for the Vietnamese. The Chinese Foreign Ministry statement issued on 21 May following stepped-up US raids in the Hanoi area took the same position and emphasized the ability of the Vietnamese to defeat the enemy on their own.

17. This response reflects the mixture of caution with regard to the US and annoyance with Hanoi which has been increasingly evident in Chinese statements during the past 12 months. Peking's sensitivity was underscored by the quick Chinese repudiation of newsman Simon Malley's alleged interviews with Chou En-lai and other Chinese leaders. The first in Malley's series of articles appeared on 14 May. On 16 May NCNA categorically denied that Malley had been given an interview by

Chou or "any other Chinese leaders" and declared that his articles were an "out-and-out fabrication put out with ulterior motives."

18. The reason for Peking's prompt move to undercut Malley and to discredit his series of articles is unclear, but it seems likely that his sensational treatment of Chinese intentions with regard to the Vietnamese war in his first article triggered Peking's move. In reporting remarks attributed to Chou En-lai and to "cultural revolution" leader Chen Po-ta, Malley put forward a new contingency under which China would enter the war openly. He claimed Chou had told him that if the USSR and the US were about to arrange a settlement that would betray the Vietnamese, China would send in troops. Malley quoted Chen Po-ta as saying, "We will never permit such a peace settlement to be imposed on the Vietnamese people. And if this means that we have to face war, we will do so with pride and confidence."

19. The statements imputed to Chou and to Chen increase the Chinese commitment to enter the war directly, thus reversing the steady movement toward greater caution in Peking's position which began in the fall of 1965. At the same time, they raise for the Vietnamese the specter of unilateral Chinese intervention whether Hanoi desired it or not. Peking's second denunciation of the Malley series on 28 May--12 days after the first--charged explicitly that the articles were part of a "political plot" by the US and the USSR to sow discord between Peking and Hanoi. The fact that the Chinese made this additional effort to blacken Malley suggests that the series had created problems in a sensitive area of Chinese foreign relations, and that Peking is anxious to minimize friction and strain in ties with the Vietnamese.

20. The Chinese are not entirely pleased with the North Vietnamese for a variety of reasons, but on balance Peking probably regards the present situation in Vietnam as reasonably good and wishes to see it continued. The Chinese have repeatedly

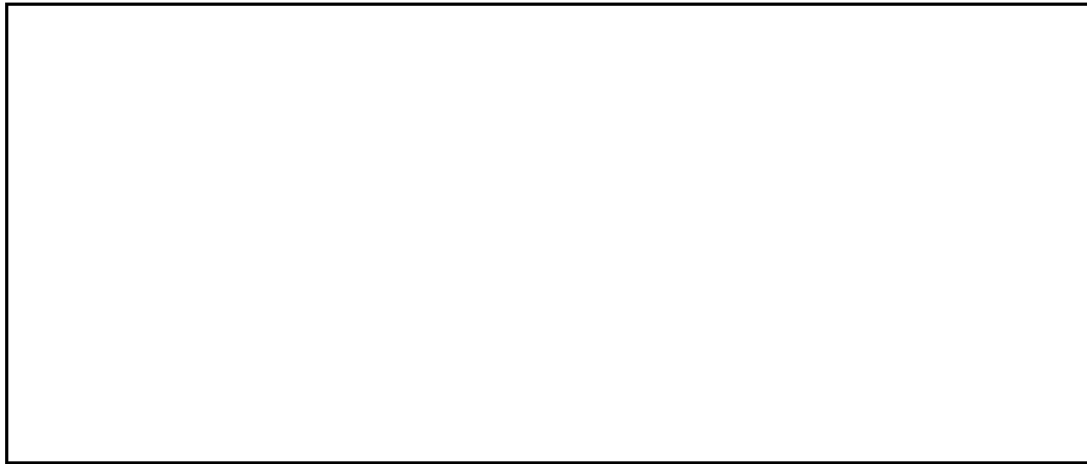


asserted, and probably still believe, that time is on the Communist side. They apparently think that if the war can be kept going long enough, the combined domestic and foreign political pressures on the US Government will become insupportable. Accordingly, the key element for Peking is to keep the war going. As long as the Vietnamese Communists are willing to stay in the fight the Chinese can be expected to give them material assistance and technical support as needed--and to put up with a great deal of ideological or nationalistic waywardness on the part of Hanoi--such as the indirect attack on Mao in the May issue of Hoc Tap, which Peking has thus far chosen to ignore.

Chinese Military Support of the War

21. Despite indications that there have been rough spots in the relationship between Peking and Hanoi, there has been no evidence of change in the level or type of support provided by the Chinese.

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24. Material assistance to North Vietnam continues to grow and Soviet aid shipped by rail across China is moving without unreasonable delay. Rail shipments appear to have been increasing and it seems likely that this year they will surpass the 420 thousand tons estimated to have been delivered in 1966. Chinese ships continue to visit North Vietnam at an average of over ten per month, about the same number as in 1965 and 1966.

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